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ABSTRACT

From the outbreak of World War I in Europe until the signing of the Versailles Treaty, President Woodrow Wilson's administration proposed and implemented an extraordinary number of programs that affected people in their everyday activities. In August 1917 Congress passed the Food and Fuel Control Act, also known as the Lever Act, which gave the president power to regulate the distribution, export, import, purchase, and storage of food--a power Wilson passed on to Herbert Hoover, the administrator of the Food Administration. This lesson relates to Article II, Section 2.1 of the United States Constitution, which establishes the president as commander-in-chief, and Section 2.2, which gives him the power to appoint government officers. Primary sources for the lesson are four World War I posters that illustrate the importance of food for winning the war. The lesson correlates to the National History Standards and to the National Standards for Civics and Government. It offers the historical background for the home front actions in World War I (with three resources). It suggests teaching activities for classroom implementation, including a group activity, document analysis, database research, designing a poster, a student research project, and writing an essay. Appended are a poster analysis worksheet and the World War I posters. (BT)

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National Archives and Records Administration

THE CONSTITUTION COMMUNITY

The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930)

Sow the Seeds of Victory! Posters from the Food Administration During World War I

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The Constitution Community is a partnership between classroom teachers and education specialists from the National Archives and Records Administration. We are developing lessons and activities that address constitutional issues, correlate to national academic standards, and encourage the analysis of primary source documents. The lessons that have been developed are arranged according to historical era.

SO033595

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Sow the Seeds of Victory! Posters from the Food Administration During World War I

Constitutional Connection

This lesson relates to Article II, Section 2.1, of the U.S. Constitution, which establishes the president as commander in chief, and Section 2.2 , which gives him the power to appoint government officers.

This lesson correlates to the National History Standards.

Era 7 -The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930).

- **Standard 2C** -Demonstrate understanding of the impact at home and abroad of the U. S. involvement in World War I.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

Standard I.A.3 -Evaluate, take and defend positions on competing ideas regarding the purposes of politics and government and their implications for the individual and society.
Standard II.B.2. -Evaluate, take, and defend positions on the importance of volunteerism in American society.

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Cross-curricular Connections

Please share this exercise with your colleagues who teach history, government, marketing, and art.

List of Documents

All are posters.

1. "Sow the Seeds of Victory! Plant and raise your own vegetables . . . "

2. "Be Patriotic sign your country's pledge to save food."

3. "Food will win the war. You came here seeking Freedom. You must now help to preserve it. WHEAT is needed for the allies. Waste nothing."

4. "Eat more corn, oats, and rye products . . . "

Historical Background

Even in peaceful times Americans frequently debate fundamental questions about government: What should the federal government do? What does the Constitution sanction? What does it prohibit? What is the relationship between governmental action and volunteerism? During wars, declared or not, Americans argue even more fervently as they often witness government undertaking different and more numerous roles than it undertakes during peacetime.

From the outbreak of World War I in Europe until the signing of the Versailles Treaty, the Wilson administration proposed and implemented an extraordinary number of programs that affected the lives of Americans in their everyday activities. Even the Progressives, who tended to favor more state and federal responsibility, must have been dazed at the expansion of government action beyond the conventional arenas of public policy.

The Lever Act of 1917 represents both the normal working of American government and the extraordinary circumstances of World War I. The process of creating the Lever Act certainly followed the "legislative dance" outlined in the Constitution and congressional custom. Entries in the indexes to the *New York Times* for 1917 testify to the accepted but various interests of members of Congress in supporting or opposing the legislation; other entries show the range of lobbyists interested in supporting or opposing the bill. In this, the legislative dance seemed typically American: proposed legislation, support or opposition from special interest groups, legislative revision, and congressional hearings. In August 1917, the dance ended. Congress passed the Food and Fuel Control Act (40 Stat. 276), also known as the Lever Act.

Passage of the bill did not immediately impact the American public. Like any federal legislation, the Food and Fuel Control Act faced the next normal step: implementation, the stage of policy- making between the establishment of a policy and the consequences of the policy for the people it affects. With the authority and power granted to him by Congress in the legislation, on August 10, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson issued Executive Order 2679-A creating the U. S. Food Administration. In doing so, he created a government entity to replace an existing volunteer organization. The U. S. Food Administration, operating in each state, was to
a. Assure the supply, distribution, and conservation of food during the war,
b. Facilitate transportation of food and prevent monopolies and hoarding, and
c. Maintain governmental power over foods by using voluntary agreements and a licensing system.

Using the same authority, Wilson created two subsidiaries, the U. S. Grain Corporation and the U. S. Sugar Equalization Board. Together these bodies would extraordinarily impact American lives.

Herbert Hoover, former head of the Belgian Relief Organization, lobbied for and won the job of administrator of the Food Administration. Hoover had made clear to President Wilson that a single, authoritative administrator should head the effort, not a board. This, he believed, would ensure an effective federal organization. He further insisted that he accept no salary. Taking no pay, he argued, would give him the moral authority he needed to ask the American people to sacrifice to support the war effort. As he later wrote in his memoirs, his job was to ask people to "Go back to simple food, simple clothes, simple pleasures. Pray hard, work hard, sleep hard and play hard. Do it all courageously and cheerfully."

As head of the U. S. Food Administration, Hoover, given the authority by Wilson, became a "food dictator." The Lever Act had given the president power to regulate the distribution, export, import, purchase, and storage of food. Wilson passed that power on to Hoover. To succeed, Hoover designed an effort that would appeal to the American sense of volunteerism and avoid coercion. In designing the program, he adopted a federal approach, combining centralized power and decentralized power. He oversaw federal corporations and national trade associations; he sought cooperation of local buyers and sellers. Through it all he called for patriotism and sacrifices that would increase production and decrease food consumption. "Food," Hoover and the administration proclaimed, "will win the war."

"No aspect of the people's lives remained unchanged," wrote one historian in assessing the effect of this board and its companions, the War Industries Board and the Fuel Administration. Under Hoover's direction, the Food Administration, in league with the Council of Defense, urged all homeowners to sign pledge cards that testified to their efforts to conserve food. The government boards issued the appeal on a Friday. By the following week, Americans had embraced wheatless Mondays, meatless Tuesdays, porkless Saturdays. According to a sesquicentennial article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* , in Wisconsin's Green Lake County 100 percent of the housewives signed on

and 80 percent of Milwaukee did. Schoolchildren joined housewives in supporting the effort by signing this pledge: "At table I'll not leave a scrap of food upon my plate. And I'll not eat between meals But for supper time I'll wait." In support of the war effort, Americans discovered nouveau menus filled with dogfish, sugarless candy, whale meat, and horse steaks. They planted victory gardens and prized leftovers. Even President Wilson cooperated, grazing sheep on the White House lawns. The emphasis on voluntary support worked.

While Hoover preferred the emphasis on the "spirit of self sacrifice," he also had authority to coerce. He set wheat prices, bought and distributed wheat. Coercion plus volunteerism produced results. By 1918 the United States was exporting three times as much breadstuffs, meat, and sugar as it had prior to the war.

To achieve the results, the Food Administration combined an emphasis on patriotism with the lure of advertising created by its own Advertising Section. This section produced a wealth of posters for both outdoor and indoor display. One proclaimed: "Food is Ammunition-Don't waste it." Another featured a woman clothed in stars and stripes reaching out to embrace the message: "Be Patriotic sign your country's pledge to save the food." A third combined patriotism with a modern healthy diet message. At the top, the poster encouraged readers to: "Eat more corn, oats and rye products-fish and poultry-fruits, vegetables and potatoes, baked, boiled and broiled foods." At the bottom, the poster concluded "Eat less wheat, meat, sugar and fats to save for the army and our allies." All of these posters, now part of Record Group 4, the Records of the U. S. Food Administration, testify to the intent of the government to mobilize the food effort during World War I. As much as possible, it did so under a banner of volunteerism, rather than coercion. In doing so, the Wilson administration created a program that did affect the everyday lives of Americans during World War I.

An executive order of August 21, 1920, terminated the remaining branches of the U.S. Food Administration.

Resources

Elle, Kenneth. *Herbert Hoover* . Boston: Twayne, 1980.

Fausold, Martin L. *The Presidency of Herbert Hoover* . University of Kansas Press, 1985.

Heckscher, August. *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* . New York: Scribner's, 1991.

Teaching Activities

Group Activity

1. Inform students that in August 1917 President Wilson issued an executive order that created the U.S. Food Administration. Using the Historical Background information, explain the goals, purposes, and organization of the agency.

Divide students into three groups and ask them to imagine that they work for the Food Administration. Instruct the first group to create a list of measures that they would take to ensure the supply, distribution, and conservation of food during the war. Instruct the second group to create a list of measures that they would take to facilitate transportation of food and prevent monopolies and hoarding. Finally, instruct the third group to create a list of measures that they would take to maintain governmental power over foods by using voluntary agreements and a licensing system. Direct a spokesperson from each group to report back to the class with the group's ideas.

Document Analysis

2. Explain to students that one approach taken by the Food Administration to meet its objectives was the development of an extensive advertising campaign. Distribute copies of the featured documents to each student and make a transparency of the Poster Analysis Worksheet . Lead a class analysis of the posters, encouraging students to respond to each of the worksheet questions. Ask students to identify the similarities and differences between the posters.

Database Research

3. Inform students that the posters they analyzed in Activity 2 are available online in the National Archives NAIL database, and that there are many more. Introduce students to research using NAIL located at http://www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html. Require pairs of students to access the site and to locate five other posters that the U. S. Food Administration created. Ask students to list and identify all symbols of patriotism that appear in the posters. Lead a class discussion about the posters.

Design a Poster

4. Assign students to design a poster for the U.S. Food Administration that conveys the emotions they believe most likely to result in an American's responding by saving food. Display these around the classroom.

Research

5. Require each student to locate an article in a professional historical journal that deals with the subject of propaganda. Ask each student to write a formal annotated bibliographical entry for the article and a definition of propaganda based on the information in the article. Lead the class in a discussion about propaganda and ask students to determine which posters developed by both the Food Administration and by the students in Activity 4 meet the definition and which do not.

Essay

6. Inform students that by 1918 the United States was exporting three times as much breadstuffs, meat and sugar as it had prior to the war. Ask each student to write an essay

of 2-3 pages explaining the extent to which the advertising campaign of the U.S. Food Administration contributed to this fact.

The documents included in this project are from Record Group 4, Records of the United States Food Administration. They are available online through the National Archives Information Locator (NAIL) database at http://www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html, control numbers NWDNS-4-P-59, NWDNS-4-P-58, NWDNS-4-P-60, and NWDNS-4-P-61. NAIL is a searchable database that contains information about a wide variety of NARA holdings across the country. You can use NAIL to search record descriptions by keywords or topics and retrieve digital copies of selected textual documents, photographs, maps, and sound recordings related to thousands of topics.

This article was written by Linda Simmons, an associate professor at Northern Virginia Community College in Manassas, VA.

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Poster Analysis Worksheet

1. What are the main colors used in the poster?

_____

2. What symbols (if any) are used in the poster?

_____

3. If a symbol is used, is it

   a. clear (easy to interpret)? _____
   b. memorable? _____
   c. dramatic? _____

4. Are the messages in the poster primarily visual, verbal, or both?

_____

5. Who do you think is the intended audience for the poster?

_____

6. What does the Government hope the audience will do?

_____

7. What Government purpose(s) is served by the poster?

_____

8. The most effective posters use symbols that are unusual, simple, and direct. Is this an effective poster?

_____

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Sow the seeds of Victory!
plant & raise your own vegetables
WRITE TO THE NATIONAL WAR GARDEN COMMISSION — WASHINGTON, D.C. for free books on gardening, canning & drying.
"Every Garden a Munition Plant"

Poster 1: "Sow the Seeds of Victory! Plant and raise your own vegetables . . . "

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Poster 2: "Be Patriotic sign your country's pledge to save food."

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FOOD WILL WIN THE WAR

You came here seeking Freedom
You must now help to preserve it

WHEAT is needed for the allies
Waste nothing

UNITED STATES FOOD ADMINISTRATION

Poster 3: "Food will win the war. You came here seeking Freedom. You must now help to preserve it. WHEAT is needed for the allies. Waste nothing."

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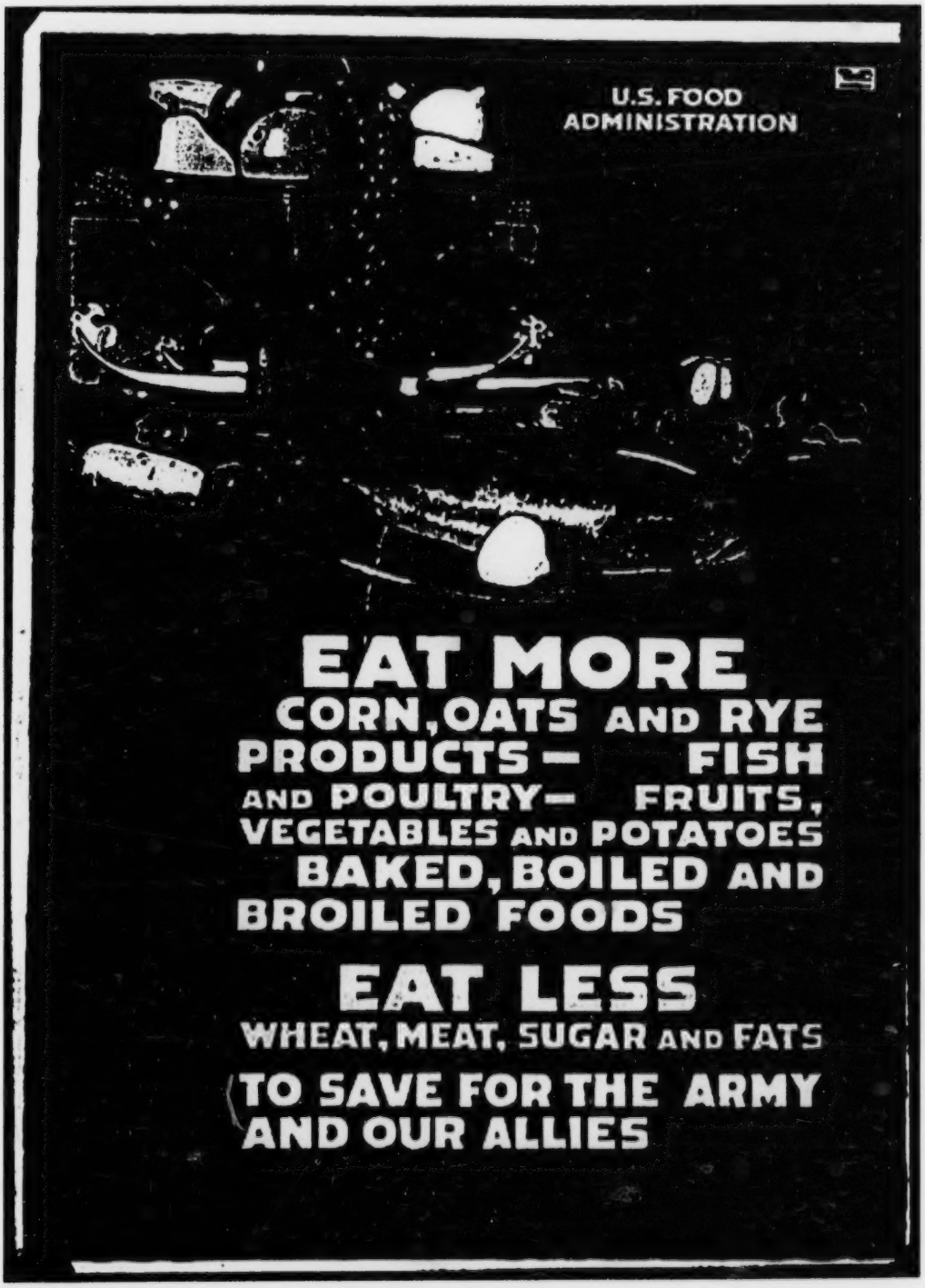

Poster 4: "Eat more corn, oats, and rye products . . . "

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